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...Burgerville strike

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looked at the unilateral announcement as the company's way of sidestepping the bargaining process and putting the union at a disadvantage.

The strike began at 11:30 a.m. Oct. 23 at the 8218 NE Glisan St. location. Striking workers formed a caravan and traveled to three other locations, where workers joined them in walking out: 1135 NE MLK Blvd., 1122 SE Hawthorne Blvd., and 3504 SE 92nd Ave. Workers at a fifth unionized location, 19119 SE McLoughlin Blvd., didn't take part in the strike. At least initially, dining rooms closed at the struck stores, though managers continued to operate the drive-throughs.

Rather than maintain a constant picket outside the struck stores, strikers instead assembled with supporters for daily actions. On Oct. 23 they picketed the Rose Quarter location on opening night of the Portland Trail Blazers basketball season. On Oct. 24 they protested outside Burgerville corporate headquarters in Vancouver. On Oct. 25 a roving picket went from store to store. And on Oct. 26 they gathered at the Hawthorne store for a pancake feed with Industrial Workers of the World



Striking Burgerville worker Betty Buchanan makes minimum wage — \$12.50 an hour — after nine months working the drive-through at the NE 82nd and Glisan location. "I'm on strike because it's not fair that we make minimum wage, when you know how much work we do and how hard we work."

members from all over the Northwest.

Burgerville Workers Union is proposing that the starting wage be set at \$1 above minimum wage, rising 50 cents above that each year. The union also wants a clear process for workers to get full time hours: Most workers are scheduled just under 30 hours a week, which is the company's threshold for health benefits, said union spokesperson Emmett Schlenz.

Would paying more than minimum wage put Burgerville out of business? At the bargaining table, Burgerville is represented by Kristin Bremer Moore of the Tonkon Torp law firm. She's been very careful not to say the company can't afford pay increases, unionists say, because that would trigger an obligation to open the privately held company's books to prove it.

In the Oct. 16 press release

announcing the raise, Burgerville said it secured a loan to make the wage increase possible.

Burgerville's bargaining team has also thrown a legal curveball into negotiations, says attorney Kate Suisman, who's been helping the union in negotiations: The company claims it can't pay unionized workers more than workers at non-union stores because of Oregon's new pay equity law, which was meant to end discriminatory pay disparities.

Thus far, the two sides have tentatively agreed to several provisions: an option to bank an anniversary bonus to use as vacation pay, and a system enabling workers to donate sick leave to co-workers who face a health emergency. Schlenz said they also seemed close to agreeing to a policy giving employees more predictable schedules.

Burgerville has already implemented company-wide one of the union's key proposals: Tip jars and a tipping option in its point-of-sale systems. Tips are pooled among staff, and so far, they're adding 75 cents to \$1.50 an hour to workers' pay.

The two sides are scheduled to meet again for further negotiations on Nov. 5.

Burgerville Workers Union is asking the public to boycott all Burgerville locations until the company signs a union contract.

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